



LESSON 19

True and False Conversions

“That is the reason we have so many ‘mushroom’ converts, because their stony ground is not plowed up; they have not got a conviction of the Law; they are stony-ground hearers.”

GEORGE WHITEFIELD

Kirk’s Comment

I thought “backsliding” was a common, normal occurrence in Christianity until I understood the reality of false conversions and their prevalence in our churches today. This lesson is a real eye-opener.

QUESTIONS & OBJECTIONS

“I was once a born-again Christian. Now I believe it’s all rubbish!”

When a person maintains that he was once a Christian, but came to his senses, he is saying that he once knew the Lord (see John 17:3). Ask him, “Did you know the Lord?” If he answers yes, gently say, “So you admit that He is real and that you are in rebellion to His will.” If he says, “I *thought* I did!” this gives you license to gently say, “If you don’t *know* so, then you probably didn’t.” If he didn’t know the Lord, he was therefore never a Christian (1 John 5:11–13,20). Explain to him that the Bible speaks of false conversion, in which a “stony ground” hearer receives the Word with joy and gladness. Then, in a time of tribulation, temptation, and per-



secution, falls away. If he is open to reason, take him through the Ten Commandments, into the message of the cross, and the necessity of repentance and faith in the Savior.

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Perhaps one of the most neglected concepts in the contemporary Body of Christ is that of true and false conversion. Why it is neglected is a mystery because the New Testament is filled with teachings about the subject and gives many examples of false converts. The Scriptures speak of false prophets, false teachers, false apostles, and false brethren.

A clear understanding of the subject will help ensure that we are not guilty of preaching a gospel that reaps false converts.

When Jesus gave His disciples the Parable of the Sower, it seems that they lacked understanding of its meaning: “He said to them, ‘Do you not know [understand] this parable? and how then will you know [understand] all parables?’” (Mark 4:13). In other words, the Parable of the Sower is the key to unlocking the mysteries of all the other parables. If any message comes from the parable, it is the fact that when the gospel is preached, there are true and false conversions. This parable speaks of the thorny ground, the stony ground, and the good-soil hearers—the false and the genuine converts.

Once that premise has been established, the light of perception begins to dawn on Jesus’ other parables about the kingdom of God. If one grasps the principle of the true and false being *alongside each other*, then the other parabolic teachings make sense: the Wheat and Tares (true and false), the Good Fish and Bad Fish (true and false), the Wise Virgins and the Foolish (true and false), and the Sheep and Goats (true and false).

After telling about the Wheat and Tares, Jesus gave the Parable of the Dragnet:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like to a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall



cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Jesus said to them, Have you understood all these things? They said to Him, Yes, Lord (Matthew 13:47–51).

Notice that the good fish and the bad fish were in the net together. The *world* is not caught in the dragnet of the kingdom of heaven; they remain in the world. The “fish” that are caught are those who respond to the gospel—the evangelistic “catch.” They remain together until the Day of Judgment.

False converts lack genuine contrition for sin. They make a profession of faith but are deficient in biblical repentance—“They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate” (Titus 1:16). A true convert, however, has a knowledge of sin and has godly sorrow, truly repents, and produces the “things that accompany salvation” (Hebrews 6:9). This is evident by the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of righteousness, etc.

Judas was a false convert. It would seem that he was an example of the thorny ground. The Bible says of the thorny-ground hearer: “The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Mark 4:19). Some of these professing Christians stay within the church, and they are the ones who often discredit the name of Jesus Christ.

Although false converts fail to repent of their sins, they *do* have a measure of spirituality. Judas did. He convinced some of the disciples that he did truly care for the poor. He *seemed* so trustworthy that he was the one who looked after the finances. When Jesus said, “One of you will betray me,” the disciples didn’t point the finger at the faithful treasurer, but instead suspected themselves, saying, “Is it I, Lord?” So it’s not surprising that few within the Body of Christ would ever suspect that we are surrounded by those who fall into the “Judas” category. However, alarm bells should go off when the church, which ought to have massive clout in society, sadly lacks it when push comes to shove. With our 142 million professed believers, we can’t even outlaw the killing of unborn children.

As William Iverson wrote in *Christianity Today*, “A pound of meat would surely be affected by a quarter pound of salt. If this is real Christianity, the ‘salt of the earth,’ where is the effect of which Jesus spoke?”



God knows the genuine from the false, and He will separate them on the Day of Judgment.

QUESTIONS

- 1. What did Jesus tell His disciples when they questioned Him about the Parable of the Sower?**
- 2. Name some of the parables Jesus told that speak of true and false conversions.**
- 3. When will false converts be exposed?**
- 4. What damage can be done by a Christian who doesn't understand that there is such a thing as a false conversion?**
- 5. How can we make sure we are not responsible for bringing false converts into the church?**



FEATHERS FOR ARROWS

The Bible tells us in Luke 22:47 that Judas led a “multitude” to Jesus. His motive, however, wasn’t to bring them to the Savior for salvation. Modern evangelism is also bringing “multitudes” to Jesus. Their motive may be different from Judas’s, but the end result is the same. Just as the multitudes that Judas directed to Christ fell back from the Son of God, statistics show that up to 90 percent of those coming to Christ under the methods of modern evangelism fall away from the faith. Their latter end becomes worse than the first. They openly crucify the Son of God afresh.

In their zeal without knowledge, those who prefer the ease of modern evangelism to biblical evangelism betray the cause of the gospel with a kiss. What may look like love for the sinner’s welfare is in truth eternally detrimental to him.

Like Peter (Luke 22:51), our zeal without knowledge is actually cutting off the ears of sinners. Those we erroneously call “backsliders” won’t listen to our reasonings. As far as they are concerned, they have tried it once, and it didn’t work. What a victory for the prince of darkness, and what an unspeakable tragedy for the church!

Last Words

William McKinley (1843–1901), twenty-fifth President of the U.S., was assassinated six months after his inauguration. Shot by an anarchist at an Exposition in Buffalo, New York, he lingered for eight days. His farewell words were:

“Nearer, my God to Thee, nearer to Thee. It is the Lord’s way. Good-bye all!”

Memory Verse

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”

MATTHEW

10:32,33